# the Golden Age™

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BOOK TWO OF FOUR

"We had the bomb."

I've no time for this.

no time.

"Masks" has been finished for months. I should close my mind to the nonsense of super-heroes. Forget.

I should--

Too much to do--Research for the baseball documentary--Sound looping for the one on psychiatric hospitals.

So why? Why am I constantly going back, to review--add to my file on mysterymen?

Why can't I put it all aside?

And why--does the only one of us making news anymore--

--have to be Tex Thompson?

"...WHOSE METEORIC RISE IN BOTH THE SENATE AND THE PEOPLES' HEARTS, WAS FURTHERED ON THAT CHILLY MORNING...

"...FEBRUARY 5TH, 1948... WHEN HE PUT THE 'HERO' BACK IN 'SUPER-HERO.'"

And my teeth are due for a check-up.

Something about him--I'm uneasy is all. Uneasy.

I'M NOT NOW, NOR EVER HAVE BEEN, ONE TO HIDE BEHIND VEILED WORDS AND POLITICAL RHETORIC. MY OPINIONS... MY POLITICAL GOALS ARE A MATTER OF PUBLIC RECORD.

IT'S FOR YOU THE PEOPLE TO DECIDE IF I'M THE MAN YOU WANT TO REPRESENT YOU... IF MY GOALS MIRROR YOUR OWN. YOU KNOW WHERE I STAND ON RUSSIA... THE THREAT TO DEMOCRACY I FEEL IT POSES. AND YOU KNOW I FEEL WE SHOULD MEET THAT THREAT *HEAD ON.*

YOU KNOW MY ADMIRATION FOR THE NOBLE... *VALIANT* EFFORTS OF THE *HUAC*, TO KEEP THESE SHORES CLEANSED OF THE BLOODY *RED* STAIN THAT'S SPREADING ACROSS THE REST OF THE WORLD.

THIS LEADS US TO MY DREAM... ALSO PUBLIC RECORD... OF A GOVERNMENT-BACKED GROUP OF MYSTERY MEN AND SUPER-HEROES TO TAKE ON... TO *VANQUISH* THE RUSSIAN THREAT... NATIONALLY OR *INTERNATIONALLY.* ANYWHERE FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY ARE WANTING.

YES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THAT *WAS* MY DREAM.

AND NOW...

...IT'S BECOMING *REALITY.*

*LOOK* WHO *I* HAVE HERE.

*THIS*... IS MY CORE. THREE *BRAVE* AMERICANS WILLING TO SERVE AND PROTECT THEIR COUNTRY.

*THE ATOM*, THE DIMINUTIVE, *DYNAMIC* JUSTICE SOCIETY MEMBER, IS KNOWN TO YOU ALL, I'M SURE.

*ROBOTMAN* TOO. HE HAS MORE THAN PROVEN THAT BENEATH HIS METAL SHELL IS A BRAIN... *A SOUL*... *ALL*-HUMAN, *ALL*-HERO.

AND AS FOR *THIS* YOUNG MAN...

STEP FORWARD, DAN. DON'T BE SHY.

FEW REMEMBER *T.N.T.*, A SUPERPOWERED MYSTERY MAN WHO GAVE HIS *LIFE* GUARDING THE WARTIME HOMEFRONT. FEWER STILL REMEMBER HIS SIDE-KICK DAN THE DYNA-MITE... *DANIEL DUNBAR.*

BUT *THAT* IS GOING TO CHANGE... AND *REMEMBER* HIM YOU *WILL*. TESTS MADE ON DANIEL HAVE PROVEN HIS BODY CHEMISTRY IS *PERFECTLY* SUITED TO EXPERIMENTS THAT MY TEAM OF SCIENTISTS ARE CONDUCTING.

EXPERIMENTS THAT WILL TRANSFORM DANIEL DUNBAR...

...INTO THE GREATEST... *MIGHTIEST* CHAMPION AND PROTECTOR THIS COUNTRY'S *EVER* SEEN.

...FURTHER NEWS TODAY ON THOMPSON'S NEWLY FORMED, GOVERNMENT-BACKED...

...COALITION OF MYSTERY-MEN--

SO AL PRATT'S ONE OF THOMPSON'S PEONS.

IF I WAS ONE OF THE BIG GUNS...FLASH OR THE LANTERN, I'D WORRY. IF HE DISCLOSES THEIR REAL IDENTITIES TO THE GOVERNMENT IT COULD GET UNPLEASANT FOR THEM.

AL WAS TOO... TOO YOUNG... VOLATILE. I DON'T RECALL MANY OF THEM TRUSTING HIM WITH THEIR REAL NAMES.

IN FACT, I DON'T REMEMBER THEM REVEALING MUCH OF ANYTHING PERSONAL TO HIM.

OH YES...HOW *COULD* I FORGET. IT WAS YOUR HUSBAND THAT EVERY-ONE WENT TO WITH THEIR SECRETS.

LIBBY LAWRENCE WAS A WOMAN OF PURPOSE. ONCE. A WARTIME-LIFETIME AGO.

HER HUSBAND.

THE WORDS LEAVE AN AFTERTASTE OF PEPPER AND JEALOUSY ON JONATHAN LAW'S TONGUE.

SOMETHING.

NEED SOMETHING... TO RINSE MY MOUTH WITH.

NEVERTHELESS... LAW'S RIGHT...

JOHNNY CHAMBERS WAS THE ONE PEOPLE WENT TO WITH THEIR PROBLEMS... AND SECRETS.

HE STILL IS.

I KNOW IT'S REMOTE, JOHNNY... BUT THAT'S THE WAY I LIKE IT... *WANT IT.* REALLY.

I WAS NEVER THE MOST "SOCIAL" OF SOCIALITES, EVEN BEFORE MY BREAKDOWN.

BUT YOUR GUILT... ABOUT THE BOMB? YOU'RE OVER THAT?

THE BOMB, I GUESS... BUT THE GUILT? I...I'M NOT SURE.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND, AREN'T THEY ONE AND THE SAME?

*TED SIGHS, AND JOHNNY LIGHTS A CIGARETTE.*

*TED TALKS, AND JOHNNY LISTENS.*

"IT WAS 1936 WHEN I DISCOVERED IT.

"USING A TELESCOPE WITH A SPECIAL RADIOGRAPHIC PROBE, I DISCOVERED AN ELEMENTAL PROPERTY... A COSMIC RADIATION OUT THERE IN SPACE.

"I HAD TO STUDY IT. MORE TO THE POINT... I HAD TO BE ACCLAIMED FOR DISCOVERING IT. THAT MATTERED TO ME... THEN.

"IT TOOK ME TWO YEARS TO INVENT AN ASTRAL CONDUCTOR MEANT TO DRAW SOME OF THE RADIATION TO EARTH. NOT MUCH... JUST ENOUGH TO CONTAIN AND ANALYZE. I PLANNED FOR EVERYTHING... I THOUGHT.

"THERE WAS NO REAL WAY TO TEST THE CONDUCTOR. THE RADIATION WOULD EITHER COME TO ME OR IT WOULDN'T.

"I WAS YOUNG THEN... AND *SO* WRONG. THE CONDUCTOR WORKED... TOO WELL. INSTEAD OF BEING CONTAINED... THE ENERGY RAINED DOWN ON HALF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT.

"AND WITHIN SIX MONTHS THERE WERE MEN WITH THE SPEED OF MERCURY, THE WINGS OF ICARUS... WITH POWER RINGS AND SUPER STRENGTH. 1939 THIS WAS, WHEN THE COSTUMES STARTED APPEARING.

"I FEEL... THE RADIATION COULD HAVE BEEN THE ONE COMMON AFFECTING FACTOR IN ALL THE HEROES' ORIGINS. UNKNOWN, IT MIGHT HAVE ADDED TO EVENTS... MAKING FORMULAS AND POWER-PILLS AND ANTI-GRAVITY DEVICES WORK, WHEN NORMALLY THEY WOULDN'T.

"IT MAY *EVEN* HAVE AFFECTED THE MINDS OF OTHERWISE RATIONAL, NON-SUPERPOWERED PEOPLE TO DO THE IRRATIONAL... TO DON GAUDY CAPES AND COWLS AND GO FIGHT CRIME."

THAT I MAY HAVE CAUSED ALL THIS--IT'S MY DREAD, JOHNNY, MY SECRET FE--

*NONSENSE* IS WHAT IT IS, TED! WHERE IS THIS RADIATION? DID YOU GET ANY TO STUDY?

A LITTLE. IT ALSO HELPED CREATE MY GRAVITY ROD. BUT IT WAS TOO VOLATILE... HARD TO CONTAIN. IT SOON DISSIPATED...

TED, GET A GRIP, EH. STOP LOOKING FOR WAYS TO BLAME YOURSELF--THE BIRTH OF THE SUPER-HERO, THE BIRTH OF THE BOMB.

THINGS HAPPEN CAUSE THEY HAPPEN. THAT'S ALL.

I KNEW YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME.

HOW CAN I--?

DON'T WORRY, I DON'T THINK OF YOU AS ANY LESS OF A FRIEND. COME. LET'S CHANGE... BOTH SUBJECT AND ROOM.

RESEARCH? THE STUFF YOU WERE WORKING ON AT NIGHT IN THE SANAT--ER-- THE REST-HOME?

IN THE SANATORIUM, YES. I FEEL GUILTY ABOUT IT... ABOUT *FURTHER* DEVELOPING EINSTEIN'S THEORIES. BUT I'M COMPELLED... THE SCIENTIST IN ME.

SO YOU'RE HAPPY HERE? ALONE LIKE THIS?

I HAVE THE STARS.

MY RESEARCH IS ALMOST COMPLETE.

BUT I'M NOT ALONE, JOHNNY.

TOMORROW.

TOMORROW'S OPERATION IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

A FEW FINAL INTERNAL TESTS. YOU WON'T BE ON THE TABLE FOR MORE THAN HALF AN HOUR.

AND THEN?

TWO WEEKS... AND YOU BECOME REBORN.

NOW GET SOME SLEEP.., REST... YOU CAN NEVER GET ENOUGH.

TOMORROW.

HE HAS A THOUSAND PRISTINE TOMORROWS AHEAD OF HIM.

HE HAS A FUTURE.

HAPPY...

A GOLDEN AGE BECKONS DANIEL DUNBAR.

...AT LAST.

CHARLIE BOWLES COULD NEVER FINISH ANYTHING.

HE'D HALF DRINK A CUP OF COFFEE -- HALF SMOKE A CIGARETTE -- THERE'D ALWAYS BE FOOD LEFT ON HIS DINNER PLATE.

ON AIR

... MARSHALL PLAN, WHICH IS SEEN AS A REACTION TO RECENT EVENTS IN CZECHO-SLOVAKIA.

AND TO CLOSE, IT IS MY SAD DUTY TO REPORT ON THE DEATH OF GOTHAM BROADCASTING WRITER CHARLIE BOWLES.

TODAY CHARLIE FINISHED SOMETHING. HE PUT A GUN TO HIS TEMPLE AND ENDED HIS LIFE.

ALAN SCOTT IS THE GODFATHER OF CHARLIE'S SECOND CHILD. HIS MOOD HAS BEEN BETTER.

WHY DIDN'T HE FIGHT? WHY? I WOULD HAVE STOOD BY HIM.

DAMN THOSE *HUAC* BASTARDS. AND... *DAMN* CHARLIE TOO... FOR BEING A COWARD. WHAT ABOUT HIS WIFE, HIS FAMILY? HOW --

MR. SCOTT! YOU WON'T BELIEVE -- DOWNSTAIRS -- THE JEWELERS -- A ROBBERY!

ROBBERY?

AND THE THIEF --! I-IT'S...

...THE *SPORTSMASTER.*

WE NEED SOMEONE TO COVER THIS.

MOSELY'S AROUND, I'LL --

NO...

...I'LL GO.

*ONE LAST TIME, THINKS SCOTT.*

BECAUSE IT'S CLOSE AND IT'S THE SPORTS-MASTER. BECAUSE I'M ANGRY.

BECAUSE.

THE ALARMS WENT OFF SIX MINUTES AGO. THE POLICE WON'T BE HERE FOR ANOTHER FIVE.

IT'S GOTHAM CITY, REMEMBER.

NOBODY MOVES, NOBODY DIES.

AS FOR LAWRENCE CROCK... THE SPORTSMASTER...

STACY

...THIS IS HIS LAST CRIME.

DON'T MOVE!

ABE STORY KNOWS THE CASHIERS JOKE ABOUT HIM BEHIND HIS BACK. THEY SAY HE'S OLD... SLOW.

NOW'S HIS CHANCE TO PROVE THEM WRONG...

SHOTS!

BLAM BLAM

THINK... MOVE FAST... GOT TO...

FORGET IT, SPORTSMASTER.

...IT'S OVER.

GREEN LATRINE.

THE WAY THE BLOND "SUIT" MOVES -- THE ROLL OF HIS SHOULDERS -- HIS VOICE. AND NO ONE ELSE'S THAT TALL.

EVEN WITHOUT THE MASK, CAPE AND "DAMN BLOODY RING," CROCK RECOGNIZES HIM -- TOO MANY BEATINGS NOT TO.

COULDN'T KEEP AWAY, HUH?

I GUESS.

MISSING SOMETHING?

NOTHING IMPORTANT.

ALL RIGHT... SHOW ME WHAT YOU'VE GOT.

CROCK HAD MARRIED, BECOME A FATHER... AND THEN DIVORCED. HIS WIFE HAD VANISHED, TAKING THEIR DAUGHTER, STACY, WITH HER. TAKING A PIECE OF HIS HEART.

HE HOPED -- PRAYED -- THE SPOILS OF THIS CRIME WOULD BE ENOUGH TO GET HER BACK.

FOR HIS DAUGHTER'S SAKE, CROCK KNOWS HE CAN'T GIVE UP.

BESIDES-- NO RING MEANS PAYBACK.

IN A FAIR FIGHT HE'D WIN, THINKS CROCK.

BUT THE CRESCENDO WAIL OF SIRENS... THE NEED TO ESCAPE...

...MEANS THIS FIGHT CAN'T BE FAIR.

ADIOS.

YOU... YOU... BASTARD... COST ME... STACY... DAMN Y--

ARM'S ON FIRE.

HEY, BUDDY, YOU ALL RIGHT? ...YOU O.K.?

I FAILED... FAILED!... SCREWED IT...

WE'RE ONLY HUMAN.

WHOA! RELAX!

I HATE THE DESERT.

IT'S THE FLIES... AND THE PERMANENT DRYNESS IN MY MOUTH.

"COUNTDOWN... COMMENCING NOW."

I HATE THE WAITING, TOO.

IT'S ALL *SUCH* A GAMBLE... THERE'S NO WAY WE COULD *TEST* WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO.

THERE'S ONLY ONE DUNBAR... ONE TIME... ONE CHANCE.

GOD, I *HOPE* THIS WORKS.

GOD... I'M SURE... WANTS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS.

"...SEVEN... SIX... FIVE... FOUR..."

"...THREE..."

"...TWO..."

"...ONE."

WHAT A VISION!!

YOU AREN'T HERE AS A SPECTATOR... IT'S TIME TO WORK.

SYSTEMS... LIFE-SUPPORT CHECK.

HEART AND RESPIRATORY SYSTEMS FINE.

PULSE NORMAL. BRAIN-WAVE ACTIVITY INCREASED... BUT ONLY SLIGHTLY.

DAMN... WE CAN'T COMMUNICATE WITH IT. TRANSMITTER'S DOWN. OR COULD THE BOMB BE AFFECTING THE RADIO WAVES?

MAYBE THE RECEIVER WAS DAMAGED IN THE BLAST.

BUT WE HAVE TO KNOW THE CONDITION OF HIM.

HOW SOON CAN WE GET A TEAM OUT THERE?

HOW SOON?

UH... I...

...I DON'T THINK THAT'LL BE NECESSARY.

WHAT?

WHY?

HUH?

THE POD'S OPENING.

HE'S COMING OUT.

GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!

THOMPSON WANTS HEROES, DOESN'T HE?... TO WORK FOR HIM?

THAT'S WHY I'M HERE.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF SUPER-HEROES

I AM A SUPER-HERO... REALLY I AM!

YEAH, YEAH. SURE, "SUPER-MAN."

YOU CAN TELL US ALL ABOUT IT, ON THE WAY OUT.

HE'S NOT THE FIRST. THEY COME IN HERE WANTING ATTENTION--WASTING MY TIME.

MEN LIKE HIM -- FRUITCAKES...

WEIRDOS.

CEI-U.

WHAT IN GOD'S NAME--

I'M SORRY, MR. PRATT.

HE SAID HE WAS... I DIDN'T BELIEVE... I'M SO SOR--

OH...

...IT'S YOU.

IT'S US.

AL... BABY!

I NEEDA' BELONG--BE PART O' SOMETHING. DIDN'T FEEL I BELONGED IN TH' STATES--*NOT* AFTER THE WAR ENDED. *TIBET*--WENT THERE TRYIN' TO FIND MYSELF--S'WHERE I WAS BORN, AFTER ALL.

ME WITH MY BOWTIE AND BUBBLEGUM--I STUCK OUT LIKE I DON'T KNOW WHAT. CHINESE COMMIE ARMY INVADIN' THE PLACE DIDN'T HELP EITHER--

JOHNNY THUNDER'S VOICE IS A HIGH-PITCHED, GRATING DRONE. NOT THAT AL PRATT IS LISTENING.

DUNBAR GETS THE GLORY--I GET "RECRUITING AND ADMINISTRATION," THINKS PRATT. I GET AN OFFICE.

AN OFF-WHITE OFFICE.

WITH NO WINDOW.

JOHNNY, YOU WERE NEVER A HERO.

YOU WERE ALWAYS JUST A WEIRD GUY WE PUT UP WITH 'CAUSE YA HAD A "*PET*" THUNDERBOLT.

I *SHOULD* REJECT YA.

BUT A NEW DECADE'S STARTING... AND IN SUCH A TIME, I GUESS EVERY-ONE DESERVES A SECOND CHANCE.

EXCEPT ME, IT SEEMS.

I HATE OFF-WHITE.

POLITICIANS PROMISE MUCH AS THEY GRAB THEIR WAY TO THE TOP.

THOMPSON PROMISED AMERICA THE IMPOSSIBLE...

"HE CAN FLY!"

...AND HE DELIVERED.

"HE HAS THE STRENGTH OF A THOUSAND MEN!"

"INVULNERABILITY!"

"AND IF HE WANTS... HIS FISTS HAVE THE PERCUSSIVE FORCE OF A BOMB!"

"HE IS THE CHAMPION OF THE NEW AGE... THE ATOMIC DAWN... THE FUTURE ACCORDING TO TEX THOMPSON..."

"HE IS DYNAMAN!"

"DANIEL DUNBAR... THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE GLINT OF SUN IN HIS EYES AND IN HIS SMILE. THE AMAZING BEING WHO SPRANG FROM THE ASHES OF AN ATOMIC TEST... AND INTO AMERICA'S HEARTS!"

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! *FELLOW AMERICANS!*

I AM THE FIRST OF A NEW BREED OF SUPERBEING.

*HOW* DO I *DIFFER* FROM THE MYSTERY MEN OF YORE?

THE DIFFERENCE IS THE *OPENNESS* AND *HONESTY* WITH WHICH I BARE MYSELF TO YOU. *WHERE* IS THE MASK? *WHERE* ARE THE SECRETS WHICH WERE *SUCH* A PART OF MY WARTIME PEERS?

AMERICA -- *TODAY'S AMERICA* -- NEEDS *SUPERMEN*... PURE, CLEAN AND WHOLESOME. *NOT* "MYSTERY" MEN WITH THE SHADOWS, DECEITS AND SUBTERFUGE THAT ACCOMPANY THEM.

AND I WISH THAT DECEIT AND SUBTERFUGE WERE *THINGS PAST* IN THE *REST* OF THE WORLD.

ACROSS THE WATERS IN DISTANT LANDS, THE CLOUDS OF *COMMUNIST* OPPRESSION GROW *EVER* DARKER. I AM WARY -- *VERY* WARY -- FOR THE FUTURE.

BUT *UNAFRAID*. I AM *STRONG* AND WILLING TO *FIGHT* TO PRESERVE HONEST, CHERISHED, *AMERICAN* VALUES... *EVEN* IF IT MEANS MEETING THIS THREAT HEAD ON...

...TAKING IT TO THE HOME-SOILS OF *RUSSIA* AND *CHINA*.

HE'S PASSED *ALL* THE TESTS, YES? SPEED AND FLIGHT? STRENGTH? INVULNERABILITY?

YES.

...ER... ALL BUT THE LATTER.

WHAT... ARE YOU SAYING?

DUNBAR'S SUPERPOWERED IN MANY, MANY WAYS.

IT WOULD TAKE AN INFINITE NUMBER OF PUNCHES, BLOWS, OR BULLETS TO HURT HIM.

BUT... HIS ABILITY TO RESIST INJURY IS RELATED TO HIS ENERGY LEVEL.

SO IF HE WAS TIRED, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO DAMAGE HIM?

YES, ALTHOUGH... AS HIS STAMINA IS *LIMITLESS*, IN THEORY HE'LL *NEVER* TIRE. SO... IT WOULD SEEM I'M WRONG...

...DYNAMAN *IS* INVULNERABLE.

GOOOD. *VERY* GOOD.

BUT *PLEASE*... FEAR *NOT* FOR THE FUTURE. I BELIEVE THAT AMERICA'S ULTIMATE DESTINY *IS* A *GLORIOUS* ONE. FOR I HAVE *FAITH*... IN THE DIRECTION AND VISION OF MY LEADER, MENTOR, AND FRIEND, *SENATOR TEX THOMPSON.*

*AND* I HAVE FAITH IN *AMERICA*, MY COUNTRY, AND *YOU*, ITS PEOPLE.

*TOGETHER, TOMORROW IS OURS!*

ALL OVER DANNY

TRUMAN HAS THE ELECTION IN THE BAG THIS YEAR, THAT'S OBVIOUS.

NO, *I'M* TALKING '52. I'M *CERTAIN* THAT'LL BE *MY* YEAR. BUT I'LL NEED CONTRIBUTIONS, LANCE. I HOPE I CAN COUNT ON YOU.

WELL, GOD KNOWS I HAVE THE MONEY TO GIVE YOU, TEX... *AND* I BELIEVE IN YO--

EXCUSE ME.

I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT, SENATOR, BUT...YOUR 3 O'CLOCK APPOINTMENT... YOU HAVEN'T MUCH TIME.

OF COURSE, YES.

BY THE WAY...THIS IS JOAN DALE, MY AIDE. I'M SURE YOU RECALL HER CAREER AS THE CRIMEFIGHTING MISS AMERICA.

YES, I REMEMBER YOUR COSTUME... VERY EYE-CATCHING.

LANCE GALLANT... THE NAME AND THE FACE ARE FAMILIAR, BUT I CAN'T QUITE PLACE THEM.

HE OPERATED OUT OF THE SOUTHWEST. TEXAS... ARIZONA. THAT'S PROBABLY WHY YOUR PATHS NEVER CROSSED.

OPERATE?...YOU MEAN HE WAS A MYSTERY MAN?

YES, AND A VERY GOOD ONE...

...BEFORE HE GOT RICH FROM OIL AND RETIRED.

"...HIS NAME WAS CAPTAIN TRIUMPH."

TOUCH IT, LANCE. TOUCH THE BIRTH-MARK.

LEAVE ME ALONE, DAMN YOU. GO FIND A HOUSE TO HAUNT OR SOMETHING.

YOU KNOW I CAN NEVER LEAVE YOU... THAT WE'RE DESTINED TO BE TOGETHER. YOU KNOW IT.

KNOW... ALL I KNOW IS YOU'VE HUNG AROUND LIKE A BAD SMELL, INSTEAD OF SHUFFLING OFF TO THE GREAT BEYOND.

LOOK, MICHAEL, I HAVE A LIFE NOW.

AND I DON'T. I NEVER CAN...NEVER WILL UNLESS YOU TOUCH THAT BLASTED BIRTHMARK AND COMBINE US AS ONE. MAKE US CAPTAIN TRIUMPH AGAIN. SO I CAN FEEL... SO I CAN LIVE!

ONCE AND FOR ALL--LANCE GALLANT, MILLIONAIRE OIL BARON AND RESPECTED MAN OF COMMERCE, IS NOT A SUPER-HERO. HE--I--DON'T NEED TO BE--WANT TO BE--NOT ANYMORE!

AND I WILL NOT--REPEAT, NOT--BRING TRIUMPH BACK TO LIFE.

MICKEY... THINK... OF THE LIFE YOU'VE ALREADY HAD. YOU WON ALL THE AWARDS AT SCHOOL. YOU GOT LAID THREE--NO, FOUR--YEARS BEFORE I DID. THEN YOU TRAVELLED... HAD WILD TIMES--

THE PAST, BROTHER. HISTORY.

IT'S NOW... I WANT LIFE NOW... WANT TO BE CAPTAIN TRIUMPH AGAIN.

TOUCH THE BIRTHMARK, LANCE. TOUCH IT!!

LANCE GALLANT HAS MILLIONS.

HE'D TRADE THEM ALL... FOR ONE DAY OF PEACE.

What? What am I becoming?

I ask this after tonight. And what happened.

I've spent a year redeveloping the Miracle Pill--augmenting its strength and sensory-enhancing properties. Altering its chemical makeup so my system would no longer ignore the effects.

A year in the lab--hating every second.

But this evening at least, I was where I wanted to be--doing what I craved.

PLEASE... I HAVE MONEY.

IT'S YOURS. DON'T...HURT... PLEASE.

I had the street. I had the night. I had an hour.

Did I have the power?

RELAX.

ENJOY.

That...was what I was going to discover.

PREPARE...

...FOR PAIN...

I'd tested and retested the pill countless times before this evening.

For strength levels... and how fluctuations in my body chemistry might alter the pill's effects.

Epinephrine rushes were tested for and countered against.

I'd prepared for everything...

...or so I thought.

And to be honest, at the time I was enjoying myself too much to care...

...up to the point when the thug pulled a gun.

For a moment... an instant... I felt fear. An instant was enough.

I'm still trying to work out what happened. Guesswork tells me that the fear altered my body's chemical balance.

Hypothalamus maybe ... Miracle and fear causing it to allow too much pituitary activity -- affecting my central nervous system.

At least I think. All I know is at the time...

...my world dissolved.

The violence became distilled with a languid after-image-- every movement precious-- an artwork

The punk was as scared as I was. Lucky-- he fired... and missed. With the flash of the gun blast frozen in its beauty.

My lower back was treacle-soft

colors bright-- distracting-- dazzling.

The grain of the brickwork was beautiful.

Body was like mercury. Had to concentrate-- Or I'd melt.

Kept fighting-- despite the spectrum flicker-flashes.

I won-- though I don't know how.

And as expected, my powers left me after an hour... the side-effects lasted for eight.

A year developing the Miracle Pill. A year wasted... with my company neglected and my life a joke.

Why doesn't it stop me? Why do I know I'll spend another year... another decade if I have to... getting Miracle perfected.

What am I becoming?

The speed control was broken. We moved-- I punched... in slow motion

Weeds in the corner of the alley, caught my eye Bright-bold nature amidst the granite. I heard the weeds sing-- saw them stretch.

My brain the projector, wasn't working.

The question is rhetorical. I know the answer.

It's not the pills' addictive effects... there are none... not anymore. No... it's the very role I play... Hourman. The rush of it.

I know what I am. It scares me but I know.

I'm an addict.

THE CHAMPAGNE IS FLAT, AND NOT THE VINTAGE PROMISED. THE HORS D'OEUVRES ARE SLIGHTLY STALE.

THOMPSON INTENDS TO COMPLAIN TO THE CATERERS AT A LATER DATE.

TONIGHT, HOWEVER, IT DOESN'T MATTER TO HIM. WHAT MATTERS ARE HIS WORDS... HIS GESTURES... THE SHEER PRESENCE WITH WHICH HE TRANSFIXES THE GATHERING.

IT'S WARM FOR AUTUMN, 1948. AND TEX THOMPSON IS UNSTOPPABLE.

PEOPLE SAID I WAS CRAZY... AT LEAST THOSE *LESS* FAR-SIGHTED AND IN TUNE WITH THE TIMES.

AND YES, I AM REFERRING TO THOSE OLDER, GREYER, STUFFIER VOICES WITHIN THE SENATE.

I BELIEVE IN REDEMPTION.

I BELIEVE IF YOU GIVE SOMEONE THE INCENTIVE TO ATONE, THEY'LL JUMP AT THE OPPORTUNITY.

IF THAT BELIEF MEANS I'M CRAZY, THEN YES, I'M A LUNATIC.

AS YOU'RE ALL AWARE, I'VE OFFERED ANY SUPER-VILLAINS WHOSE CRIMES FALL SHORT OF MURDER AN AMNESTY IN RETURN FOR THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO MY FORCES... AND TO THE AMERICAN FLAG.

TONIGHT I PRESENT THE FIRST SUCH REDEMPTION... A JEWEL THIEF AND SCOURGE OF AMERICA'S POLICE FOR MANY YEARS.

NO MORE, HOWEVER. NO LONGER!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I PRESENT THE TIGRESS...

... MISS PAULA BROOKS.

GALLANT'S LIPS ARE MOIST, YET HIS THROAT'S DRY. HIS HEARTBEAT'S A SNARE-ROLL.

SHE'S...

"...THE ONE."

"MUST GET..."

... AN INTRODUCTION, TEX. HOW ABOUT IT?

HA! OF COURSE. YOU NEED BUT ASK.

PAULA, THIS IS LANCE GALLANT. IT'S HIS MONEY THAT PAID FOR TONIGHT'S SOIRÉE.

WELL, MR. GALLANT, I HOPE YOU FEEL I WAS WORTH IT.

PLEASE, CALL ME LANCE.

"... THE ONE I'M GOING TO MARRY."

I WON'T TELL YOU AGAIN, YOU STUPID TIN CAN. YOU'RE *SUPPOSED* TO BE A HERO... *PART* OF MY TEAM.

SUIT--TIE--FEEL CONSTRAINED--SILLY--

*NOT* A PIECE OF OBJET D'ART. SOCIALIZE, TALK... *MOVE* AT LEAST, FOR GOD'S SAKE.

YOU *CAN'T* FEEL, REMEMBER. YOU *DO*... AS I SAY. NOW MAKE NICE, MINGLE... AND *TRY* NOT TO STEP ON ANYONE'S FEET.

IT SEEMS I'M MAKING A HABIT OF DISTURBING YOUR CONVERSATIONS, MR. GALLANT.

I'M SORRY... BUT WE NEED PAULA FOR SOME PHOTOS.

OH... WELL, I GUESS I'LL SEE YOU AROUND, LANCE.

I HOPE SO, MISS BROOKS.

HEY... CALL ME PAULA.

*KINDA CUTE, KINDA DULL, SHE THINKS.*

*GOOD FOR A WEEKEND IN PALM SPRINGS, MAYBE. NOTHING MORE.*

THE HUNTERS GATHER.

ONE HUNTER'S STOMACH GROWLS FROM TOO LITTLE FOOD AND TOO MUCH COFFEE. ANOTHER HATES THE CHILL BOSTON WINTER AND WISHES THEY'D FOUND THEIR TARGET BY SUMMER.

IT'S BEEN A YEAR FOR THEM... AND TWENTY TEAMS LIKE THEM. A YEAR OF SEARCHING, STATE BY MISERABLE STATE.

GAS

BUT THANKFULLY, NOW...THEIR PREY'S LOCATED...AND IN SIGHT. THE TRIO ARE ALREADY SPENDING THE BOUNTY IN THEIR HEADS.

THERE HE IS.

SO WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? LET'S GET HIM, AND GET OUT OF HERE.

WAIT NOTHIN'... CAN'T FEEL MY NUTS, IT'S SO COLD.

I'LL START UP THE MOTOR.

WAIT A MOMENT.

WAIT, I SAID. SOMEONE'S COMING.

REGULAR

ETHYL

HIYA, BUDDY.

FILL 'ER UP AND CHECK THE TIRES.

RECOGNITION ISN'T IMMEDIATE.

FOR BOB DALEY, IT TAKES A MINUTE... MAYBE TWO.

KIRK?...PAUL KIRK?

you won't be snared.

you won't be caught.

WAIT...WHAT'RE YOU DOING? I'M DALEY... BOB DALEY.

YOU KNOW ME. YOU *KNOW* ME...

...REMEMBER?

YES, I DID KNOW YOU, DIDN'T I? I THINK I *ALMOST* RECALL...

HOW DID YOU GET LIKE THIS? WHAT HAPPENED IN YOUR PAST?

MY *PAST*... DIED IN GERMANY. OR AT LEAST I ASSUME SO, I CAN'T REMEMBER. I ONLY KNOW THAT WAS WHERE I RETURNED FROM IN '96.

I'M *HUNTED*. I KNEW IT... EVERY ESSENCE OF BEING *CRIED* OUT, TELLING ME THIS.

THEN MEN WITH *GUNS* CAME, PROVING MY FEARS. I DON'T KNOW *WHO* THEY WERE... *WHO* THEY WORKED FOR... *WHY* THEY WANTED ME.

EVEN SEEING YOU... SOME *ASPECT* OF YOU CAUSES ME ANXIETY. *WHY* SHOULD I FEEL SUCH FEAR OF YOU?... OF *EVERYONE*?

NIGHTMARES PLAGUE ME. THE SAME VISIONS OF KNIVES AND DEATH--EAGLES AND SURGEONS. OVER AND OVER.

I WAS COMPELLED TO COME BACK TO AMERICA. SOMETHING WITHIN COMPELLED ME TO RETURN. YET NOW THAT I'M HERE I FEEL SO STRANDED...

SO I RUN SCARED... HIDE OUT. *EVEN* BEFORE I ENCOUNTERED THE GUNMEN, I WAS AFRAID... BUT *NOW*...

MY AMNESIA... NEEDS THERAPY. I NEED HELP TO BECOME NORMAL AGAIN... TO REMEMBER WHATEVER *MESS* I'M IN. BUT I'M TOO AFRAID TO ASK FOR IT... TO GO TO ANYONE.

...LOST.

KIRK... PAUL... IT'S *FATE* WE MET. YOU NEED SOMEONE TO *HELP* YOU... SOMEONE TO *TRUST*.

HERE I AM, PAUL. TRUST *ME*.

COME ON. WE'RE LEAVING.

GOOD COFFEE.

SORRY ABOUT YOUR HIRED HELP, THOUGH.

THANKS.

WHAT?

HE'S COMING WITH ME.

WAIT! YOU CAN'T JUST WALK LIKE THIS.

SORRY, FAY, BUT I HAVE TO. GOTTA MOVE ON.

LET'S GO.

EVERYTHING'LL BE FINE, PAUL. JUST YOU WAIT.

WAIT 'TIL HE'S A WAYS DOWN THE ROAD.

GIVE HIM A HEAD START... DON'T BE OBVIOUS.

he's fat-- funny.

you want to trust him.

you hope you can.

PAUL...

...BEHIND US, A CAR... IT'S GAINING AWFUL FAST.

and then it starts...

...the gunshots sound...

...echoing and reechoing through your skull.

immediately you're petrified.

petrified.

you're as scared as Daley--your whole body's shaking.

PAUL...TELL ME WHAT TO DO! OR DO SOMETHING YOURSELF! PLEASE! THEY'RE GAINING!

but you pretend to yourself--you pretend you remember--

--that you're a hero.

WHAT IS HE DOING?!

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

GET HIM!

SHOOT!

KILL THE SONOVVA--

A!

MUH--

GET--

STOP--

GRAB--

SHOOT--

KILL US ALL.

MOTHER OF G--

NO!

NO!

NO!

HE CAN'T BE DEAD.

MUSTN'T.

GOD...

...PLEASE

HE CAN'T BE D--

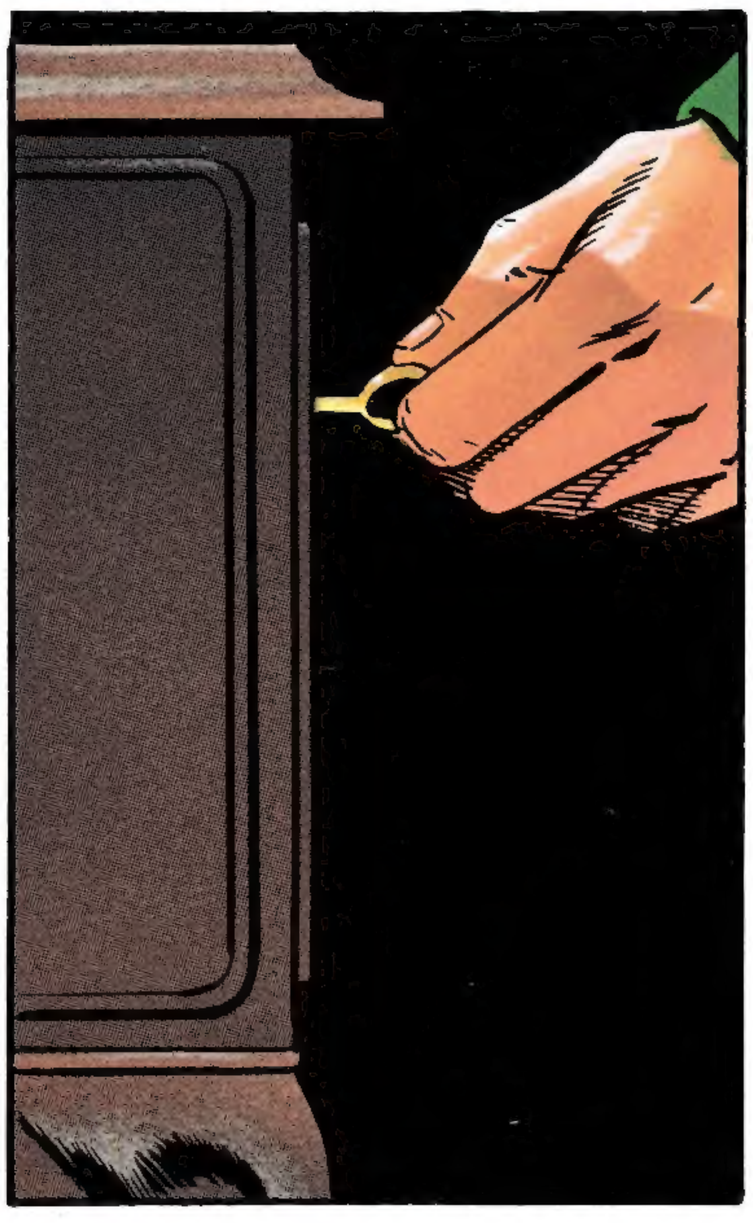
cold beyond cold--beyond feeling--

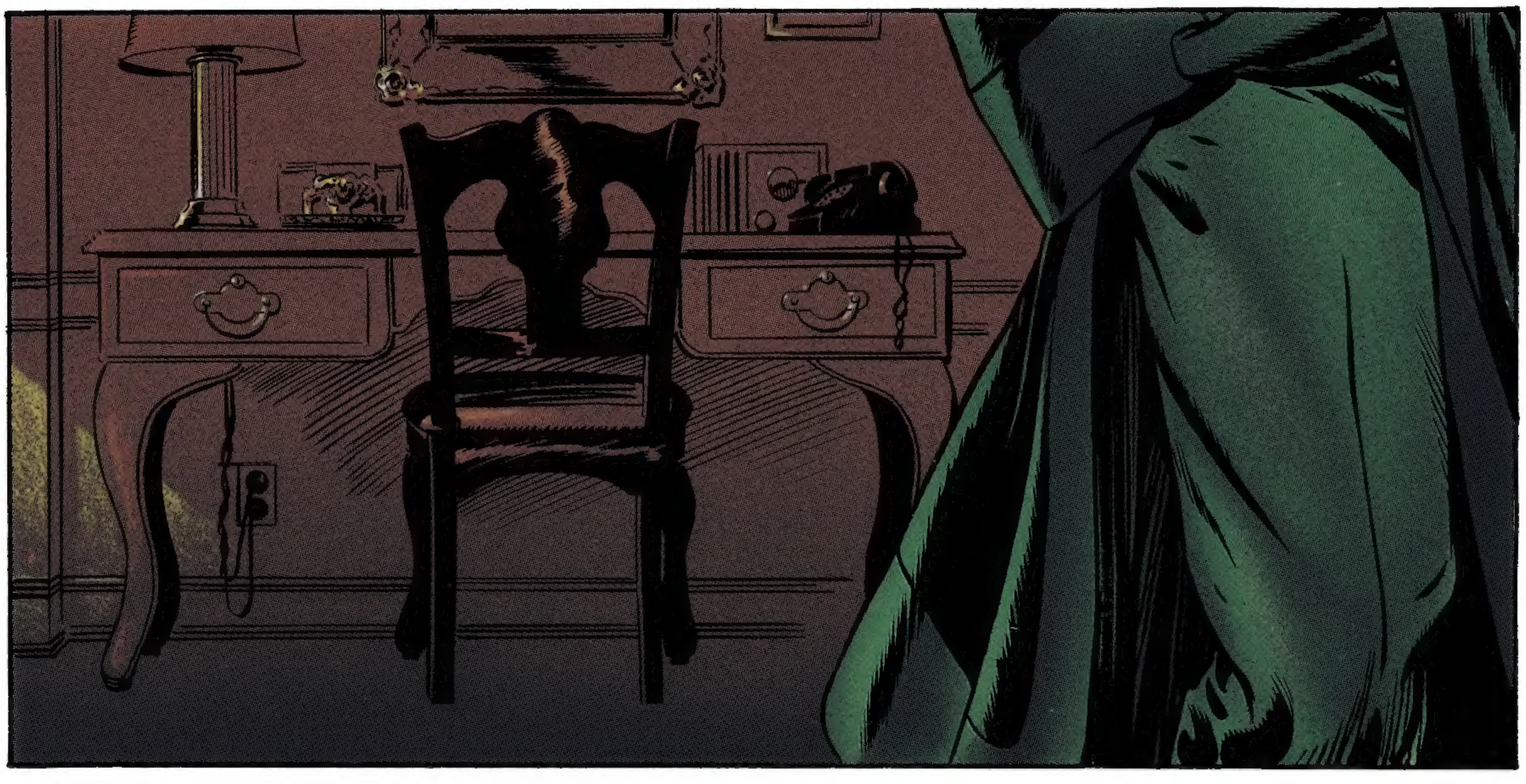
yet your fear's begun to ebb-- a little--

--replaced by anger.

the anger warms you.

Washington, DC





ALL GOES WELL.

WHAT? WHAT DID YOU SAY?

OUR PLANS... OUR ITINERARY GOES WELL.

TRUMAN'S IN THE WHITEHOUSE. I KNEW HE'D WIN THIS YEAR... THAT I WAS TOO NEW IN THE ARENA TO COMPETE.

BUT IN '52, THINGS WILL BE DIFFERENT. I'LL RUN... I'LL WIN... I'LL BECOME PRESIDENT, AND *WE* WILL RULE AMERICA.

NO...YOU'RE WRONG.

EH?

BY THEN YOU'LL HAVE CONVINCED THE COUNTRY TO ATTACK RUSSIA AND CHINA.

AND WITH ME AND OTHER SUPER BEINGS DOING THE FIGHTING, VICTORY IS ASSURED.

THEREFORE...IN 1952, WHEN YOU'RE ELECTED PRESIDENT...

SNFFFF

*WE* WILL RULE THE *WORLD*.

TO BE CONTINUED...